

## **Symphony Benefit**

### **by Bruce Fessier 12/6/11 Desert Sun**

The Coachella Valley Symphony presents its first holiday gala directed by Chalifour's successor, Wayne Abravanel, at 6 p.m. next Tuesday at Sun City Palm Desert.

The big change at the CV Symphony is that Abravanel, a full-time music teacher at Coachella Valley High School, is leading the adult ensemble and Jason Powell, a Palm Springs High School music teacher, is leading the Buddy Rogers Youth Symphony.

In the past, Chalifour ran the CV Symphony's whole brilliantly conceived farm system. It starts developing elementary school-aged kids on string instruments through its conservatory. Then they graduate into the middle and high school-aged Buddy Rogers Youth Symphony with horn, reed and rhythm musicians, and some go on to play with the CV Symphony.

This is why Abravanel says supporting Tuesday's Holiday Gala is important. He candidly says his orchestra isn't as proficient as the Desert Symphony, which uses professional union musicians while the CV Symphony is all volunteer. But the CV Symphony features professionals and Abravanel says they're improving tremendously.

They've added 10 new musicians, including noted jazz bassist Bill Saita and Los Angeles professional Joyce Washburn on oboe. Most importantly, most of the CV Symphony players have been together for more than 10 years. So they have chemistry as a unit.

Abravanel is an inspiring head coach. He worked on Broadway for 30 years as a pit musician, accompanist, cabaret music director and conductor. He loves the early 20th century Romanticists and Impressionists, such as Rachmaninoff and Debussy, and U.S. composers such as Gershwin.

Abravanel's skill as a pop conductor was borne out Sunday when he won a Desert Theatre League award as the Outstanding Musical Director of 2010-2011 for a Cabaret, Revue, One Person Show or Variety Show as director of "Divas and D'Others" at Sun City Palm Desert.